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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with four issues: (1) the aging of the faculties of high schools in the northeastern United States; (2) frequently observed characteristics of teaching seen during site visits to secondary schools for the Department of Education's Secondary School Recognition Program; (3) elitism in high schools; and (4) observations on the status of general students in high schools. Conclusions are that schools must face the matter of aging faculties and find effective ways of nurturing them. Creative study of significant writers and thinkers rather than ineffective staff development activities may be beneficial to these faculty members. High schools must address the issues latent in the overt elitism that accompanies many honors programs, and the place and education of general students must be enhanced. (CB)

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THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL:
Sailing to Byzantium

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Paper Presented at
2nd Annual Conference on
the High School
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That is no country for old men. The
young
In one another's arms, birds in the
trees
--Those dying generations--at their
song,
The salmon-falls, the mackeral-
crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all
summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music, all
neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.
W.B. Yeats (1933)

This is probably the only paper written in 1985 on the American high school that begins with a quotation by William Butler Yeats. The relevancy of the quotation may be apparent later; if not, it's a helluva quotation.

In this paper I will be commenting on four matters: (1) the ageing of the faculties in the high schools of the Northeast, (2) frequently observed characteristics of the teaching another colleague and I observed during the 1985 site visits for the Department of Education's Secondary School Recognition Program, (3) elitism in high schools, and (4) observations on the status of general students in high schools.

The ageing of the nation's high school teachers is a phenomenon now well known among those who watch schools closely. With the exception of some still-growing districts, high schools are staffed by ageing faculty. Most schools in the Northeast, for example, have large cohorts of their faculty in the forty-five and over category. Few school critics have commented upon this fact, much less proposed any reaction, although one notes that some districts and, indeed, whole states are introducing or have introduced legislation enabling

older teachers to retire early. There is something insidious in that development, the implication being either that the older teachers are inappropriate teachers for the young or that they make uncomfortably large salaries relative to what one could hire a new person for.

The educational establishment is, in fact, doing more or at least worrying more about the upcoming teacher shortages being predicted for most of the nation in the next decade than it is about the current teachers. Clearly, the Holmes Group is more concerned with teachers-to-be than with the teachers that are. When one considers that the current cohort of older teachers has another decade to serve in the schools, one sees a tragic waste of human potential.

What, if anything, is to be done with the situation of having so many teachers in the last decade of their careers? Should attempts be made to reinvigorate them? Or do we wait it out until the next wave of young people hits the schools in the middle 1990s? For me, these questions are rhetorical. To me, it is obvious that something should be done.

Indeed, one does find an occasional school attempting to address some of the issues attendant upon the presence of an ageing faculty. For example, one school I visited had, with the cooperation of the local teachers association, started a physical wellness program in an attempt to inform faculty of some of the issues and problems in maintaining health in the later years. Another school had developed an intensive program with a local higher education institution for course work for teachers designed

to help them get up-to-date in content and method. Several others were paying more attention to effective utilization of staff development days.

I would contend that one must go beyond these tentative steps, promising as they may be. The issues that must be dealt with go beyond a few sessions in the gymnasium, an afternoon with a bargain basement Leo Buscaglia or even a weekend with the real Leo, a series of workshops and experience that describe and provide training in twenty-eight new ways of using cuisenaire rods, or a few sessions with a computer freak.

The alive teachers who have been in the schools for two decades and more without losing their sense of vision that formed a part of their original decision to teach must themselves be nurtured and valued, not be seen as lemmings moving towards the little deaths of retirement, as high-salaried veterans keeping taxes high. In order not to fall prey to these potential demons, they must be treated with the respect and dignity their experience and wisdom suggest. I do not have the magic box in my possession that would solve the problems and resolve the issues implicit in these conditions. But I do have one suggestion, a suggestion underscored by one of the better writers to appear in Kappan in some time.

Joyce Ohanian, a third-grade teacher on leave, observes that:

> The good professors must stop yielding to our acquisitive pressures; they must refuse to hand out their 100--or even 10--snazzy new ideas for the well-stocked classroom. They must offer fewer

> methods, fewer recipes. We teachers need less practicability, not more. We need to have our lives informed by Tolstoy, Jane Addams, Suzanne Langer, Rudolf Arnheim, and their ilk--not by folks who promise the keys to classroom control and creative bulletin boards, along with 100 steps to reading success (Ohanian, 1985, p. 698).

Consider: we teach the humanities to the young for what appear to be two major reasons: (1) a knowledge of tradition and an understanding of the past; and (2) an understanding of the self through analysis of artistic impressions. Some of the first can be taught effectively to the young so that it stays with them for some time. Most of us have either suddenly recognized in a museum a painting whose reproduction we first saw twenty years ago, or we know someone who has. Despite this modest carryover, we would admit that such study and learning ought to be lifelong.

When it comes to self understanding, the goals are loftier and less fulfilled. The expectation appears to be that growth in self understanding through the humanities stops in high school or, at the very latest, sophomore year in college. The plethora of understand-yourself-in-thirty-days books that annually appear and sell well to adults suggests that the goal is poorly realized, that there are millions seeking a quick fix from a guru. The age cohort of many high school teachers and administrators suggests a time for reflection based on informed readings and discussions of key literary works. Thoughtful study and discussion among thoughtful

people can be of immediate help.

In a limited way, a course I teach entitled Leadership and the Creative Imagination, addresses this issue. Intended as a humanities requirement for doctoral students, the course includes the reading, discussing, reflecting on, and writing about ten to twelve novels in which the characters are involved in leadership situations. My intent is that the students see how literary artists have dealt with some of the issues that theorists have written about. Situational leadership, as a practice or theory, takes on a different context when one is considering Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men. I have used Joseph Conrad's The Heart of Darkness several times as one of the early works studied. The results of student study of this work have inevitably led to one conclusion. One must attempt to understand the self and its many complexities as part of understanding, working with, leading others. How banal, yet how necessary and how ignored. Nearly all of us are under-achievers when it comes to self-understanding. Literary study may be one of the keys to promoting effective self-understanding, even for, no, especially for adults.

On another aspect of the ageing of teachers, the 1950s and 60s, were years during which an annual influx of new teachers arrived at most high schools. There is an aspect to having many young teachers in high schools that has not been addressed much in the literature on high schools. For approximately fifteen years, from the early fifties to the late sixties, high school students had as possible role models, mentors, friends, and teachers a large number of young--under thirty--teachers. One can only speculate on the

possible dimensions of the relationships, but surely some of the relationships must have based on people of relative age similarity. There must have been, had to be something sexual to the relationships in addition to the usual teacher-student relationships. Students undoubtedly had numerous "crushes" on young teachers of the opposite sex. The lack of any significant media outpourings describing abuse in these relationships suggests that nearly all were harmless phases in people's lives, moments of innocent infatuation. The literature is mute on the possible impacts of such relationships; one can only speculate. They must, however, have contributed to the maturing of young people in special ways. Who knows to what degree the fantasy lives of students and, perhaps, teachers were affected by the age proximity?

Thus the mind's pictures of students and teachers clustered in classrooms and corridors in those years are colored by impressions of the physical intensities of young people's lives somewhat masked by discussions of the yearbook, the class play, the upcoming game, and even subject matter.

One finds a quite different set of images in schools in the 1980s. Instead of large numbers of teachers who look little older than the students, one finds teachers who look like and perhaps are mother and father figures. One sees hallway and classroom discussions, but they more resemble parent-child or family meetings than they do encounters of people who either have or imagine they have similar concerns and interests because of age proximity. Teachers and students are not seeking sexual recognition and approval; they are more likely to be playing family roles.

I dwell on these points to describe what one feels entering many high schools in the 1980s. We know, of course, that the current demographics suggest that changes are coming; we may well find ourselves in a decade or so in a situation more like the 1960s than the 1980s in terms of faculty age cohorts. But in the interim, we have the conditions described above. They cause one to wonder, to ponder.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEACHING

In a paper developed with a colleague from the program, we make the following observations about the schools and their teaching. The schools visited are, in the main, safe and healthy places for young people. The basic needs of the young are attended to; there is general order in the buildings; the adults in the school like young people and are generally well prepared to teach; parents and community members are overwhelmingly pleased with these schools; the young people themselves appear happy with schools, teachers and activities despite an occasional complaint. It would appear difficult for any student to spend three or four years in any one of these schools and not emerge with more knowledge, better skills, and an enlightened attitude. In brief, they are good schools.

Teachers in these schools work extraordinarily hard. They are in the building a half to three quarters of an hour both before and after school. They sponsor clubs and activities; they collect money; they call parents; they coach teams; they patrol halls, lunchrooms, and bathrooms. The teachers are, in the main, kind and considerate. They help students in a variety of ways; working on a class project, talking about a personal problem, getting them

started in a homework assignment, leading them to understand a complex problem or issue. Teachers are often seen in many out-of-class conversations with students in which they are engaged in friendly, informed exchanges characterized by interest and concern. The teachers are nice people interested in the well-being of their students.

Nearly all of the teachers have acquired the skills of the craft of teaching. There is a high level of competency among the teachers in the schools visited. By competency, we mean that teachers generally appear knowledgeable in the subject matter being taught, manage their classrooms with a minimum of disruption and interruption, display an air of confidence about their work, acknowledge the differences among the young people they are teaching, explain complexity fairly well, display few biases towards particular young people, show apparent warmth and affection towards many students, and are rarely thrown off their pace.

Yet, there is an aridity about much of the instruction observed in the schools. Most of the teachers have been doing their work for upwards of ten years, generally in the same school, often with the same level of subject matter. Classes often go on as though there is an invisible but known script. Generally the teachers are talking upwards of 70% of the time. They are doing a series of mini-lectures interrupted by an occasional "Everybody got that?" Occasionally, indeed rarely, students will ask a question. Teachers are almost never caught off guard by such questions; ready answers pour out: "Oh yeah, that's because...Okay?" (Ducharme and Kluender, 1985).

My visits in the schools led me to use a phrase to describe part of what I saw: The Restoration of Order. The accomplishment, on the part of schools, of what this phrase implies is no small or mean feat. Consider: ten to fifteen years ago, some of these very schools were part of perhaps the period of greatest chaos in the history of the American high school. For many, the visions implicit in words and phrases such as self-actualization, Open Classrooms, learner-directed activities, Open Campus, and so forth had disintegrated into a decline in the quality and quantity of learning, disorder in classrooms and corridors, declining attendance, near total lack of homework, weakening of the links between community and school.

Of course, the preceding is simplistic with respect to cause and effect. After all, the same period in American history also saw a general erosion of support of public institutions, rising suspicion of authority figures generally, distrust of national policies, growing fondness for self indulgence, erosion of a supposed common culture. Whether one chooses these or other characteristics of the period, one must admit that such large social issues have an inevitable effect on the schools. For example, the children from families of rapidly increasing economic power and its attendant luxuries are unlikely converts for school gospels of self restraint. Indeed, the schools may have, once again, only reflected the larger context in which they are inbedded.

Yet, intriguing as discussions and mini-analyses of social trends and their impact on schools are, it is only theorists in academic settings or think tanks who have the luxury of reflecting

or writing on such matters. The rest of us have more immediate itches to be scratched. When society turns from one fantasy to another; for example, from some vague belief and practice that learning can occur by painless intervals with others to the harsh prescriptions of Nation at Risk and the other national reports, there is little patience with responses on the order of "the schools are only a reflection of the broader society," or "you helped set the context for what is now happening."

The sad and sometimes harsh fact is that much of society sees the schools as institutions separate from whatever else may be going on, except, of course, when it wants a social problem such as segregation ameliorated. Thus, many teachers often see themselves as the agents who respond to societal itches, if only because they are there and visible.

These schools are incredibly orderly. One rarely sees untoward incidents in the various places where students congregate before homeroom, during break period, after school. Cafeterias are filled with talk but lack outward breaches of discipline; study halls--when they exist--are being used for study; libraries are quiet places for reading, reflecting, and casual conversing.

Some of my friends, when I describe the orderliness observed in these schools, counter with the knowing rejoinder that what I saw was merely the result of a visitor being there. Of course, my hubris regarding my own skill as an observer capable of ferreting out reality forces me to reject that armchair analysis. Yet the likelihood of sustained order for eighteen-plus days in nine schools because of an external visitor is low. My site visitor colleagues

reported the same phenomenon. Thus, in order to accept the external visitor analysis, one would have to assume that nearly 250 schools sustained order for 500 days because of visitors. Not likely.

Why do I emphasize the Restoration of Order so much? I do so for two reasons: First, it is a singular accomplishment, one that creates a necessary condition for certain kinds of cognitive activities in groups of the typical size of the classes visited. Secondly, it raises a most vital question: After the Restoration of Order, what next?

Occasionally, one sees a classroom filled with excitement. Students appear both interested in what is going on and somewhat uncertain about what the final results of their activities will be. In other words, they are--with the support and guidance of a potent teacher--making knowledge, albeit knowledge acquired by others previously. The Restoration of Order is being used to promote inquiry and sustained curiosity. One could do far worse.

Far more frequently, however, one sees nothing like excitement. One hears the tired banalities of the past being tossed at students; for example, "Shakespeare's sonnets are the most powerful in the English language." Maybe they are, and maybe they are not. Is it that kind of "learning" that one wants? Or "You'll use these geometry theorems all your life." Really? Is this the reason one works hard at restoring order? Better the chemistry teacher who pragmatically asserted, "Look, being able to do these experiments, if nothing else, gives you a sense of accomplishment. You know, you did something hard."

There are those who would argue, myself included, that the

Restoration of Order occurred merely so that teachers could, once again, have unlimited access to air time. Back in the 1950s, Arno Bellack established that social studies teachers talked about 70% of the time, that most student talk was limited to responses dictated by the direction of a teacher's question. In other words, both the amount of talk time and the content of the talk was almost invariably dictated by the teacher. If any of my site visitor colleagues heard anything significantly different in the Spring, 1985, high school visits, he or she has been singularly quiet on the subject.

One of the perhaps inevitable results of having been in teaching for over fifteen years is the perception that we have seen it all. Maybe we are all a bit like Joseph Heller's airman in Catch-22 who sees everything twice. There are many possible results of thinking that one has seen or heard everything twice. I will focus on only two. One is that we are potentially very powerfully equipped with knowledge and experience to encounter young people in their sometimes awkward, always moving gropes and stabs toward mental and emotional maturity. Having lived through and seen many other young people go through the joys and sorrows of adolescence, we are a rich resource. A second option, often visible, is a sense of boredom and ennui with it all. "So, Joe didn't get into Harvard. Neither did Bill two or three years ago; it didn't kill him." "They're all having trouble with the same math problems that last year's seniors did. They'll probably survive." "So what's she think, she's the only one who was ever disappointed in love?" "Nobody ever gets this poem. Why don't I just tell them what it

means?"

I suspect, from talking with teachers and students over the years and particularly this spring, that such speculations run through the minds of many teachers as for the eighteenth or twenty-second year, they face another cohort of one hundred-plus students about to study British literature or general mathematics or U.S. History.

"There is nothing new under the sun." This Biblical expression is often used by tired cynics who see each "new" phenomenon as only a different version of that which they already know. Typically it finds expression in remarks like the following: "I tried that once, and it didn't work." "I was in Detroit once; the Midwest really has nothing to offer." "When you get older, you'll see how shallow that is." I suspect that the writer of that hackneyed Biblical sentiment was in a terrible mood the day he wrote it.

To the young, there exists the reality that there <u>is something</u> new under the sun, every day. There is love; there is beauty in things familiar to the rest of us; there is hope in their own spirits that they will do better than we have with a world neither they nor we made. Good teachers support, reinforce, enlarge, enhance, and honor these feelings, these cries of the spirit. And one of the wonderful things that happen to good teachers is the experience of learning that all kids have these feelings; under the right circumstances, they will articulate them.

We have all been in classrooms in which a student, suddenly and unexpectedly, raises a question that reflects a genuine curiosity and interest, however "misguided" or "uninformed" it may be. For

example, a student reading Hamlet may ask, "Do you think Hamlet truly loved Ophelia?" or "Didn't Lincoln really care about the slaves?" When asked seriously, questions such as these suggest that the student is probing, seeking answers to dilemmas within the curriculum and the self as well.

We who have spent many years in classrooms may have heard all the variations on such questions, seen the apparent brief preoccupation students give to them. Our perhaps all too frequent reaction may be to stifle such questions because we have heard them so often.

It is easy to forget that, for the students who ask such questions genuinely, these moments are rich in potential for them. The infrequent match between cognitive activity and affective engagement may be occurring.

Our experience and sometime wisdom should be used to help students grow with their questions rather than in thwarting such instances. When we are playing literary scholar while teaching Hamlet, we may consider the question of whether or not Hamlet truly loved Ophelia irrelevant and anti-intellectual. To the student, however, the question may be the only entry point into the play.

A reinvigorated older faculty can bring wisdom and experience to the schooling of the young. The wisdom must transcend the tired banalities one often hears the older telling the younger; the experiences must be informed and vibrant, not experiences jaded by a thousand deja vu that deny the newness of everything.

The high schools of America are a place for older men and women. For behind that mirage of classes that are always the same

age, of the television shows and movies that show young teachers as heroes and heroines and older teachers as fools and buffoons, there lie human needs and aspirations that require wisdom, insight, and experience.

ELITISM

My own background includes five years of teaching Advanced Placement English during the early 1960s. Partly as a consequence of this experience and partly as a consequence of an interest in equity in the schools, I made it a point to visit at least one Advanced Placement class in each school. I observed that one aspect of AP classes had changed little, if at all, in the twenty years since I had taught AP English and sought to broaden the social base from which AP students were recruited. In these schools--and a couple of my colleagues indicated similar experiences--the students in AP classes are those wearing the most costly clothing, have far more than the rudiments of social skills, and play the games of schooling well. One occasionally sees a student who appears to be different, but upon examination, one notes that while most of the student's body is clad in studied dress-down, the feet are covered o`er with L.L. Bean boots or similar affectation of the well-to-do.

I make these observations not to suggest that these students do not belong, do not have a right to be in AP classes. One finds that these students have records that demonstrate high academic potential and sustained high performance. No, I am not for denying; rather, I am for broadening. I claim no expertise in testing and measurement beyond what might be termed survival skills. Yet I know enough to suggest that the children of the poor, the dispossessed, the

underclass, most likely display the normal curve of distribution with respect to academic potential. Numerically, they form a large group in most of our high schools. How is it, then, that so very, very few end up in classes where, as one principal put it, "I've got my best teachers doing the AP classes in every subject"?

Confronted, teachers acknowledge that, indeed, there are likely candidates among these students. Their reasons for there being so few are predictable and ancient:

> "They would rather be with their friends."
> "They are not going on to college, anyway."
> "They don't have the background."
> "They're not really interested in serious study."
> "They would slow the class down."

Is it not time that we confront these issues head-on, that we challenge these assumptions? How public is a public school that denies opportunity to one of its more treasured qualities to perhaps a fourth of its students? I would see finding, selecting, nurturing, and supporting an agreed upon number, varying based on school size, of ninth graders otherwise unlikely to ever be considered for AP work as a necessary and laudable goal for a school to undertake. Such an act would speak volumes to the students who see themselves as the victims of some curious form of academic predestination and to teachers and counselors who may sometimes use social background as a cutoff point rather than academic promise. In its simplest and most direct form, my wish is that, four years from now, one would find several kids in every AP and Honors class who look a little

different. I believe this to be a totally achievable goal.

THE GENERAL STUDENTS

I begin this section of the paper with a personal anecdote. More years ago than I care to cite, I attended my twenty-fifth high school reunion. In the years since high school, I had seen perhaps ten to fifteen of my classmates, none in the past fifteen years. So I was looking forward to the expected shock of recognition.

I had been standing in the reception area for about a half an hour, talking informally with two or three former friends. Suddenly I saw a tall man and a striking woman striding toward me. It was quite evident that he was approaching me. It took perhaps three seconds for me to note that he and his wife were clad in quite costly apparel. I was in mild panic, because I hadn't the slightest idea who he was.

"Hi, Ed," he said, shaking my hand. His voice was familiar, and I at once knew who he was. We talked briefly, the usual meaningless drivel that is the conversation when two people who were not close to begin with see each other after twenty-five years.

I could not resist. "O.K., what the hell happened to you?" I asked. "What do you mean?" he responded. "Well, the last time I saw you was graduation night. You had finished the voc ed program, and the future didn't look very bright. Now, you're all dressed in Brooks Brothers clothes; you don't speak with that Canuck accent you had; you have a fancy wife. So, what happened?"

"I went in the Navy after graduation and found out I wasn't dumb." He went on to explain how he had served four years in the Navy, gone to R.P.I. for a B.S. degree, then acquired a masters

degree. He was now a middle management type with IBM.

After the reunion I returned to Vermont and dug out my old yearbook. A casual perusal indicated that well over half the graduating class of nearly 200 had French surnames. My recollection was that only six or seven had gone to college immediately after high school. Of course, I do not know how many others found out a little later in life that they were not dumb. But, given the 1950s early marriages and immediate entries into mill and factory work for the members of the French Canadian underclass in northern New England, I doubt that many had experiences similar to that of my friend of that night.

I have pondered over this incident many times in the years since. In a global sense, I am not sure what it means. For purposes of this paper, however, I am quite sure what it means: human beings ought not to go through twelve years of schooling and end up convinced that they are dumb, to use my friend's word.

As in most schools, the plight of the general student in School Recognition Program schools is dreadful. Oh, one occasionally sees an inspired teacher devoting much time and energy to finding interesting and challenging things for them to do. The norm, however, is for the time to be spent in performing some boring, repetitive task allegedly designed to teach the students the "necessary basics" for later life, whatever they are. When was it not ever thus for these students? In English classes they read boring stories designed to appeal to students with reading difficulties of unspecified measures. Unfortunately, the sophistication level of the material approximates that of a 7th

grader. Those who do succeed in being able to read the story soon recognize that they have succeeded in reading something that has virtually no meaning for them or something nobody should bother to read. Or they do grammar drills that have neither purpose nor clarity. Somehow, they are supposed to become better users of the language. In math classes one sees them attempting to solve problems the solutions to which are devoid of practicality. The irony of watching kids who can, on the street, figure out the value of a 1/100th of an ounce of grass being stymied by how many eggs a housewife would need to make a cheesecake of a certain weight is almost too rich for any observer. Or the tragedy of the teacher instructing twelve 11th graders in the intricacies of the courts through the textbook and a state-approved outline. One student put it all into perspective for this observer when he said, "Oh, she's a nice lady, but, shit, I been to court."

> In too many instances we have betrayed our democratic dream by operating educational programs as if only the more advanced students could understand and appreciate our cultural, political, and ethical ideals. To shield average students from the wisdom and power of our heritage keeps them class-bound and vitiates the potential power of our schools ...(Honig, 1985, p. 676).

The general students are the most vulnerable in the school. Rarely do they have an agenda for after high school days beyond some vague concepts of a job, perhaps marriage, maybe the service.

Unlike their college-bound contemporaries, they do not have ready-made objectives regarding what high school should teach them. For the school, they represent no future threat. Future national reports and horror stories about low student achievement will rarely deal with how well or poorly the graduates of 1985 are doing in the military, in the local Dunkin' Donut shop, in the delivery trucks, or in the maternity wards. They will deal with the status of SAT scores, numbers and percentages of kids going on to four-year colleges, and so forth. Parents will not come back to the principal and complain about their son's low math ability and its impact on the low-status job he has obtained. No, the parents who come in and complain will likely be the parents of the young man or woman doing poorly in college English. They will want changes made so that their younger child will not have such a rough time. Generally speaking, the general students have no voices for their shoddy treatment.

These students lack a curriculum of any value or merit. They are often the victims of someone's version of a"dumbed-down" treatment of what real students study or the recipients of the old text and materials discarded by the college preparatory classes.

They lack an effective General Education curriculum. Because they lack one, the high school is only a place that merely contains young people and serves as a holding place for the daylight hours during nine months of the year. Without an educational program providing the development of useful knowledge, critical thinking skills, and informed self-concept, these students merely mark time. Without good General Education, these students emerge from high

school as "diploma'd" illiterates, uncertain of who they are, where they are, and why they are. They become entrapped in a world they didn't make; they develop selves they cannot understand or relate to well, and they lack a fundamental understanding of the "world out there."

A memorable moment occurs in the movie Diner. Two of the central male characters from Baltimore, habitues of an all-night diner, have driven out to the Maryland countryside in early morning. They see a young woman riding on horseback, stop and exchange a few words with her. Through the dialogue, the movie establishes the social and economic chasm separating the worlds of Fenwick and Boogie, the two young men, from the world of the young woman. As they are getting back into their car, Fenwick says: "Do you ever get the feeling there's something going on we don't know about?"

There is much going on in the world that many people don't know about. A more effective General Education for high school students obviously is too weak a vehicle to resolve many of the issues of being young in a society stratified by wealth, class, and, perhaps more often than we think, culture. Young people from the lower social and economic sectors of American society are further distanced from the haves by the allegedly pragmatic and clearly second-rate education they are provided. They fail to understand the problems in the society, much less do much about them in ways meaningful to their own lives.

There is some power in knowledge; some control of one's life can come about through a better understanding of the world. There are ideas that have helped shape the world; there are understandings

of scientific principles that can help produce a more informed person.

A potent general education will not only provide students with useful knowledge about their nation, its peoples, its traditions, its history, and its possible futures. It will also provide students

with opportunities to learn of the great art works in both print and visual media. But, beyond these necessary learnings, it will enable the students to ask compelling questions about themselves and their lives, and their world. It should provide students with the skills and knowledge not only to achieve and hold a job, but--more importantly--to make decisions about what kind of job, what type of commitment. Great achievements in art not only overwhelm their readers and viewers; they also provide the genesis for question-raising. For example, students reading Joseph Heller's Catch-22 learn a great deal about effective use of language, hyperbole, characterization, dialogue, and story line. They also learn that Catch-22 asks the question: why World War II, indeed, why any war?

In a piece concerned with teacher education and liberal education which I wrote some time ago (Ducharme, 1980), I enumerated abilities that teachers ought to possess. I believe general education to be a recursive process; that is, one learns or experiences similar things in a variety of ways and modes throughout a lifetime. Therefore, one can postulate that the abilities I might demand in a teacher are the same abilities I would desire in high school students, albeit in a modified version. The abilities:

*Ability to use the English language effectively, in both written and spoken formats

*Ability to read complex materials with understanding

*Ability to use mathematical symbols and processes including computer applications

*Ability to transcend their own ethnocentrism

*Ability to honor cultural diversity

These abilities, of course, imply a set of attitudes; for example, before one can develop the ability to honor cultural diversity, one must first consider such a skill of merit. One ought to have teachers who consider the honoring of cultural diversity a worthwhile goal.

Why is the valuing of cultural diversity of merit? I believe the coming years are not and will not be the times for understanding others only in the ways in which they may be like ourselves. These are times for clear understandings and celebration of differences as well as of similarities. If students are to live effectively for the year 2001, if the many and diverse are to thrive in our nation and in the larger world, then the young of today ought not to be taught to winnow out the differences between themselves and others, stark at times, and assume some kind of vague perceived core of all cultures like the brotherhood and sisterhood of man and woman. Some societies and cultures not only look different from Western forms; they are different. We ill serve students by always seeking the common at the expense of understanding the different and the complex.

Effective general education should include mastery of the skills enumerated earlier; I further believe that, at least in the humanities and related areas, materials should come from a range as

broad as that of the diverse peoples they serve. In some instances, *for example, a literature syllabus may well include* many works on various Great Books lists; in other places, it may contain such work only to illustrate the thinking and work of the minority in that region. Such an approach inpugns neither the value of nor the need for the study of, for example, the works of Shakespeare. What it says is that it is the ability to read and recognize greatness that marks the educated person, not the recognition of who wrote what. It is this kind of exploration that should characterize our search for effective general education. One would hope that future high schools "recognized" by the Program would demonstrate movement towards potent general education for general students.

CONCLUSION

The Secondary School Recognition Program provides site visitors with a unique opportunity to observe a number of schools in an intense, albeit brief manner. This visitor came away impressed with efforts and progress schools are making. Yet, as is always the case, problems and issues inhere.

Schools, perhaps in the northeast particularly, should face the matter of their ageing faculties and find effective ways of nurturing them. As Ohanian and I suggest, the study of potent writers and thinkers instead of mindless "staff development" or inservice activiies may help. Clearly the Restoration of Order should lead to more artistry in teaching in addition to masterly craftsmanship. High schools must address the issues latent in the overt elitism that accompanies many honors programs. Finally, the place and education of general students must be enhanced.

I contend that the issues implicit in the final three are those that might be best addresssed by the ageing faculty cohorts who can both lend their wisdom and experience and renew their sense of dignity and worth. Yeats may not have been totally right. Byzantium may be a country for old men and women.

NOTES

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